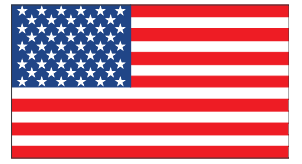


5000 West



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Open with pride



photos by John W. Zawiske

5400 West National Avenue

Not in a gazillion years did Jon Baker, Milwaukee VA Regional Office director, ever dream he would be in a brand-new building – and one with a new address; 5400 West National Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53214. Actually, he has been the Milwaukee RO director since 1988.

The building, on the western edge of the VA campus, is so state-of-the-art that in the Washington's Veteran Benefit Administration offices, buildings on the drawing boards are being brought up to "Milwaukee class" standards.

The new \$13 million Milwaukee VA Regional Office officially opens for business today with the formal dedication scheduled at 11 a.m. on Wednesday, August 25.

In the past week, 142,000 files have been moved from building 6 just a few blocks away. Building 6, in the historic district on the Medical Center campus, was dedicated in 1879 for Civil War soldiers.

The RO has had several locations in the city. In 1983 the move from downtown to building 6 was to be short term, according to Mr. Baker. "Our people have been waiting 21 years and everybody is real excited. This is something they deserve. This is the best Regional Office in



"Welcome!" A smiling Jon Baker opens the door to the new \$13 million Regional Office. The privately built building has accouterments not seen in traditional government buildings.

the country – worst to first," he says with a broad smile. "This is a building veterans can be proud of. It is a tribute to their service."

"A lot of people did a lot to get us here," said Mr. Baker. "This is an enhanced use building. It is a little different than most in that we don't own the building." With no money in the budget for construction, enhanced use was the answer. Simply, a developer builds the building and then leases it to the VA for a specified number of years after which it reverts back to the VA. At the

(turn it over)



new Regional Office, the developer also has a building manager on site that will be responsible for cleaning, maintenance, snow removal and landscaping, etc.

The new building will have floors able to support the weight from large volumes of paperwork the staff deal with on a daily basis. In 1879, buildings were not built to handle the paper load and files had to be stored in the basement.

Security will be obvious as you enter and go through the magnetometer. There is one entrance that all will use. Employee ID's will contain a computer chip to access doors to other areas. The VA Police will provide for security and policing duties.

“Just as a matter of work flow, the new building is ideal,” explained Mr. Baker. “Our teams are all together. The files are in the work area. It will make things much easier for us. Another nice thing is all the public contact is right off the main floor lobby: the interview area, voc rehab, canteen and all the service organizations. They are all together, and it is bus stop accessible.”

“It’s a dream come true.”



The new Milwaukee VA Regional Office was built in less than a year’s time through a process called enhanced use. Jon Baker, RO director, is shown at the construction site as work begins on August 14, 2003. Domiciliary building 123 is in the background as well as the superstructure for Miller Park, the home of the Milwaukee Brewers Baseball Club.

A new space for Heidi

Heidi Schweitzer-Taavao is really pumped! She may be a little anxious, and chances are she didn’t get much sleep last night. “It is like going to a new job.” Mrs. Schweitzer-Taavao is a former Peace Corps volunteer with a BA in English. She has worked at the Regional Office for two years as a veterans service representative who adjudicates pension claims for non service-connected disabilities.

To say she is looking forward to the new facility would be understated. She will miss the historic qualities of the old building. “It is in a beautiful setting, and there are aspects of the old building that are very quaint.” But, then you could say she is overwhelmed with the new place. “I didn’t expect it to be that beautiful with the cherry wood and the warm colors. The aesthetics are just beautiful. I think that is what I am most impressed with, more so than all the ergonomics.”

“I think for the veteran this building is great because it is so much more professional. It sends a message that we care about providing service for them. It will be a very positive thing.”

She is looking forward to the security, the new furniture, improved acoustics, indirect lighting,



Heidi’s last week in her cubical in building 6, a building built as a hospital for Civil War soldiers with one wing added later as a “TB Camp.”



Heidi in Dest.219.04. This is her home in the new Regional Office. Her workspace walls are now the industry standard height of 54 inches with in-wall computer connections. Supervisors worked the holiday weekend to get ready for the first day of operation – today.

natural light from the windows as well as the uniform temperature control. Reservations “...maybe the number of bathrooms.”



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The community relations office publishes 5000 West bi-weekly as a channel of communication for employees, volunteers, patients and friends. 5000 West is committed to enhancing the image of the Medical Center and its employees and volunteers through information, recognition and entertainment.

Articles of interest are welcome. The editor reserves the right to use and edit contributed stories. Submission deadline is two days prior to publication. Your comments are encouraged and should be directed to editor (00Z) 5000 West, VA Medical Center, Milwaukee, WI 53295: telephone (414) 382-5363 or (888) 469-6614, extension 45363 or e-mail john.zewiske@med.va.gov

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